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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000369

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/3/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: MAJLIS PASSES 18 OF 21 AHMADINEJAD CABINET PICKS  
  
DUBAI 00000369 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence  
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Majlis today approved 18 of Ahmadinejad's 21 cabinet nominees, including his controversial choice for Defense Minister. The two-week run-up to the vote featured much public grumbling by Conservative Majlis members about both lack of prior executive branch consultation on the nominees and also about many nominees' lack of relevant job experience. In the days prior to the vote there were also press reports both of widespread bribing of Majlis deputies, and also of pressure from Supreme Leader Khamenei for the Majlis to approve Ahmadinejad's cabinet, to preserve the appearance of national unity. Although one female nominee was approved, making her Islamic Iran's first female minister, two of the three rejected candidates are women, and their defeat may reflect conservative and religious discomfort with women ministers. Proposed Defense Minister Vahidi, whose nomination became controversial internationally because of his alleged involvement in a 1994 terrorist incident, secured the highest number of votes. Although the number of spurned Cabinet nominees was one fewer than his first term and fewer than many had anticipated, given that prior to Ahmadinejad almost all Presidential cabinet nominees were approved without exception, this vote and the process leading up to it bespeaks nothing so much as a politicized and fractious atmosphere within the ruling conservative elite. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) The Majlis today confirmed 18 of Ahmadinejad's 21 proposed ministers, including the controversial pick for Defense Minister, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi (NOTE: Vahidi's nomination prompted an international outcry due to his alleged participation in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Argentina.) Perhaps most surprising was the confirmation of Ahaminejad's Oil Ministry nominee Seyyed Masud Mirkazemi. Mirkazemi was the Commerce Minister in Ahmadinejad's first term but several Majlis members had excoriated Mirkazemi's nomination to this key position due to his total lack of petroleum sector experience. Given Ahmadinejad's difficulty getting his Oil Ministry pick confirmed in 2005, when the Majlis rejected three nominees in a row, many analysts expected the Majlis to reject Mirkazemi's nomination.

13. (C) Proposed Health Minister Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi was also confirmed with 175 out of 286 total votes, making her the first post-Revolutionary female cabinet minister. Her approval is not entirely unexpected, given that she also has been active in

health issues for many years, has worked in the Health Ministry, and served in the Majlis from 1992-2000. The rejection of the two other female cabinet picks (for the Education and Welfare Ministries) could indicate lack of conservative and religious comfort with the idea of female ministers or could instead be indications of continued sparring over these two ministries, each of which control vast and potentially lucrative bureaucracies.

14. (C) The proposed Energy Minister Mohammad Aliabadi was the other nominee (and the only man) to have been rejected. Aliabadi was Ahmadinejad's Vice President for Physical Education and headed Iran's national Olympic committee. He was criticized for lacking any experience in the energy field, although given the overall lack of qualifications of many of the candidates, it is unlikely that this was the sole cause of his defeat. He had the most contentious hearing process, with corruption allegations featuring prominently in them.

15. (C) The final vote comes on the heels of speculation about the propriety of the confirmation process. There had been rumors and press stories in recent days alleging Majlis deputies were bribed to gain their support, and reports of lavish Iftars feting the Majlis members to curry favor. These rumors did not slow the vote and do not appear to have derailed any of the nominees. Other press reports indicate Supreme Leader Khamenei exerted pressure on the Majlis to approve Ahmadinejad's nominees to prevent the appearance of disunity within the government during this politically sensitive time. Khamenei does typically pre-approve several of the key Ministerial nominees (Intelligence Minister, Interior Minister, Foreign Affairs Minister, and Islamic Culture and Guidance Minister) and as such their confirmation was not surprising.

DUBAI 00000369 002.2 OF 002

16. (C) COMMENT: This confirmation process and the exact number approved in and of itself will have little long-term effect on Ahmadinejad's second term. Many of his supporters (and some Western press) are interpreting this vote as a 'victory,' as the outcome could have been worse. Prior to the vote, senior Majlis members predicted that "at least four or five nominees would be rejected" and several expressed their frustration with Ahmadinejad's failure to consult with parliamentarians before making his selection. However one IRPO contact who has served in the Majlis notes that such public comments by Majlis members are unimportant, as last-minute deals and horse-trading immediately before the vote tend to be determinative. Only two candidates--two of the three women nominated--received more 'nay' votes than 'yea' votes. This time, the number of spurned Cabinet nominees was one fewer than four years ago when the Majlis rejected Ahmadinejad's picks for the Ministries of Oil, Education, Cooperatives, and Social Welfare. However, given that prior to Ahmadinejad almost all Presidential cabinet nominees were approved without exception, this vote and the process leading up to it bespeaks nothing so much as the politicized and fractious atmosphere within the ruling conservative elite that Ahmadinejad's Presidency has created. END SUMMARY.  
EYRE